



Sociology: Introductory readings

3rd edition

Edited by

Anthony Giddens and
Philip W Sutton

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Introduction – The Sociological Perspective

This new Reader replaces the previous edition, which was last published in 2001. However, it is a significantly different book this time. Firstly, it contains fewer readings, selected as representative of key issues and subjects. Secondly, the material is organized into ten key themes reflecting the development of sociology's central concerns since the classical founders: Marx, Durkheim and Weber. Thirdly, the Reader tries to strike a productive balance between the older and classical work and more contemporary research that reflects the present state of the art. Fourthly, we have provided stronger and more effective summary essays for each of the themes in order to make this a genuinely student-friendly text. Finally, the impact of globalization will be seen in most of the themes as recognition that the global dimension of modern life is becoming ever more important. One last thing to note is that, with the exception of Anthony Giddens on 'the scope of sociology', all of the readings are new to this edition.

In making these changes we have tried to create a Reader that accurately reflects established and emerging trends in sociology as well as in society at large. For example, environmental issues, the transformation of work, sexualities and romantic love, the impact of the Internet, cybercrimes, shifting patterns of health and illness, terrorism and democratization are all included here. But these are included alongside, not instead of, classical readings on stratification and class

conflict, social solidarity, the nature of power, deviance and crime, the social self, the essence of religion and the origins of capitalism. Our aim is to offer a concise yet comprehensive resource that will be useful for both lecturers and students.

The book is designed as a standalone text for introductory level sociology and can be readily used as an accompaniment to any sociology textbook. For those who may already have or use Polity's Giddens *Sociology, 6th Edition* (2009), a guide to the relevant chapters and sections in that book is provided alongside recommendations for Further Reading at the end of each themed section. The Further Reading boxes point readers towards some of the relevant works which take further the issues that are introduced here. These are of course only our suggestions and there are many more possibilities.

Sociology remains a vibrant, wide-ranging and exciting academic enterprise in the twenty-first century and one that has to be able to adapt and change quite rapidly in order to keep pace with the similarly fast-moving social world. Today's sociology is very different from that of the 1950s or even 1980s. It is more diverse, both theoretically and in terms of its subject matter. It has incorporated many more areas of social life in more specialized fields of enquiry. The older, staple subjects are still there – education, work, organizations, urban life, inequality, research methods, families and religion. But



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1. Private Troubles, Public Issues

C. Wright Mills

The promise

Nowadays men often feel that their private lives are a series of traps. They sense that within their everyday worlds, they cannot overcome their troubles, and in this feeling, they are often quite correct: what ordinary men are directly aware of and what they try to do are bounded by the private orbits in which they live; their visions and their powers are limited to the close-up scenes of job, family, neighbourhood; in other milieux, they move vicariously and remain spectators. And the more aware they become, however vaguely, of ambitions and of threats which transcend their immediate locales, the more trapped they seem to feel.

Underlying this sense of being trapped are seemingly impersonal changes in the very structure of continent-wide societies. The facts of contemporary history are also facts about the success and the failure of individual men and women. When a society is industrialized, a peasant becomes a worker; a feudal lord is liquidated or becomes a businessman. When classes rise or fall, a man is employed or unemployed; when the rate of investment goes up or down, a man takes new heart or goes broke. When wars happen, an insurance salesman becomes a rocket launcher; a store clerk, a radar man; a wife lives alone; a child grows up without a father. Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both.

Yet men do not usually define the troubles they endure in terms of historical change and institutional contradiction. The well-being they enjoy, they do not usually impute to the big ups and

downs of the societies in which they live. Seldom aware of the intricate connection between the patterns of their own lives and the course of world history, ordinary men do not usually know what this connection means for the kinds of men they are becoming and for the kinds of history-making in which they might take part. They do not possess the quality of mind essential to grasp the interplay of man and society, of biography and history, of self and world. They cannot cope with their personal troubles in such ways as to control the structural transformations that usually lie behind them.

Surely it is no wonder. In what period have so many men been so totally exposed at so fast a pace to such earthquakes of change? That Americans have not known such catastrophic changes as have the men and women of other societies is due to historical facts that are now quickly becoming 'merely history': the history that now affects every man is world history. Within this scene and this period, in the course of a single generation, one sixth of mankind is transformed from all that is feudal and backward into all that is modern, advanced and fearful. Political colonies are freed; new and less visible forms of imperialism installed. Revolutions occur; men feel the intimate grip of new kinds of authority. Totalitarian societies rise, and are smashed to bits – or succeed fabulously. After two centuries of ascendancy, capitalism is shown up as only one way to make society into an industrial apparatus. After two centuries of hope, even formal democracy is restricted to a quite small portion of mankind. Everywhere in the underdeveloped world, ancient ways of life are



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2. The Scope of Sociology

Anthony Giddens

Sociology is a subject with a curiously mixed reputation. On the one hand, it is associated by many people with the fomenting of rebellion, a stimulus to revolt. Even though they may have only a vague notion of what topics are studied in sociology, they somehow associate sociology with subversion, with the shrill demands of unkempt student militants. On the other hand, quite a different view of the subject is often entertained – perhaps more commonly than the first – by individuals who have had some direct acquaintance with it in schools and universities. This is that in fact it is rather a dull and uninformative enterprise, which far from propelling its students towards the barricades is more likely to bore them to death with platitudes. Sociology, in this guise, assumes the dry mantle of a science, but not one that proves as enlightening as the natural sciences upon which its practitioners wish to model it.

I think that those who have taken the second reaction to sociology have a good deal of right on their side. Sociology has been conceived of by many of its proponents – even the bulk of them – in such a way that commonplace assertions are disguised in a pseudo-scientific language. The conception that sociology belongs to the natural sciences, and hence should slavishly try to copy their procedures and objectives, is a mistaken one. Its lay critics, in some considerable degree at least, are quite correct to be sceptical of the attainments of sociology thus presented.

My intention in this [discussion] will be to associate sociology with the first type of view rather than the second. By this I do not mean to connect sociology with a sort of irrational lashing-

out at all that most of the population hold to be good and proper ways of behaviour. But I do want to defend the view that sociology, understood in the manner in which I shall describe it, necessarily has a subversive quality. Its subversive or critical character, however [...], does not carry with it (or should not do so) the implication that it is an intellectually disreputable enterprise. On the contrary, it is exactly because sociology deals with problems of such pressing interest to us all (or should do so), problems which are the objects of major controversies and conflicts in society itself, that it has this character. However unkempt or otherwise student radicals, or any other radicals, may be, there do exist broad connections between the impulses that stir them to action and a sociological awareness. This is not [...] because sociologists directly preach revolt; it is because the study of sociology, appropriately understood, [...] demonstrates how fundamental are the social questions that have to be faced in today's world. Everyone is to some extent aware of these questions, but the study of sociology helps bring them into much sharper focus. Sociology cannot remain a purely academic subject, if 'academic' means a disinterested and remote scholarly pursuit, followed solely within the enclosed walls of the university.

Sociology is not a subject that comes neatly gift-wrapped, making no demands except that its contents be unpacked. Like all the social sciences – under which label one can also include, among other disciplines, anthropology, economics and history – sociology is an inherently controversial endeavour. That is to say, it is characterized by



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3. What is Sociology For?

Richard Jenkins

There are many views about what sociology is and what its business should be, all of them bound up with questions about the nature of its subject matter. Apart from the vague ‘study of society’ which is probably the most common fall-back position, sociology can be defined in a number of complementary ways. At its most basic it is the study of patterns in human behaviour. Among other things this means that sociology pays particular attention to established relationships between humans; which is why the study of institutions and how they work has always been fundamental to the sociological enterprise. Sociology has, however, always been as interested in individuals as in collectivities. It is particularly concerned with the many ways in which individuals are influenced by human factors outside their immediate environment or control. Finally, sociology has always been concerned with the shared ways in which human beings interpret their lives, with meaning.

What connects all of these is that sociology is the study of the recurrent or regular aspects of human behaviour. Wishing one neighbour a good morning and ignoring another is not, as a one-off occurrence, sociologically interesting. Do it every day, and, as an established relationship of inclusion and exclusion, it becomes so. If this can be connected to wider patterns of behaviour – for example, if the neighbour that you ignore is a member of a different ethnic group than both you and the neighbour that you greet – its sociological interest increases. Similarly, the fact that one woman is elected to an otherwise all-male legislature isn’t necessarily sociologically significant.

However, that women members come, over time, to number in their tens, scores or hundreds, certainly is.

However we define sociology’s subject matter, there will be many different perspectives on it. There are those for whom the fundamental building blocks of sociological analysis can only be individuals, others for whom they must be collectivities. Some sociologists believe we can establish the causes of human behaviour and its patterns, others insist that all we can do is interpret what people do. While some adopt a detached and apparently disinterested perspective on the human world, others think that sociology should be actively oriented towards intervention. Some base their understanding of the human world on numbers and quantity, others focus on in-depth description. There are many different – apparently exclusive, if not mutually antagonistic – theoretical schools, each with its own model of the discipline and its subject matter.

The picture becomes more complex again if we consider the many substantive specialisms, which can give every appearance of intellectual autonomy. There are sociologies of health and illness, religion and ritual, inequality and stratification, economic activity, kinship and the family, deviance, socialization and education, culture, everyday life and interaction, organizations, politics, and gender relations, to mention only a few. Lastly, to muddy the waters even further, national sociologies – defined generically or otherwise – have their own intellectual histories and distinctive styles and concerns, the importance of which shouldn’t be overlooked.



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Part 1

Theories of Society

Sociology is a product of the eighteenth-century French and industrial revolutions, which marked the end of medieval social relations and the onset of a new, technologically advanced age of modernity. But how did this huge transformation come about and was it permanent? Where are industrialization and urbanization taking us in the future? What are the consequences for community life of large-scale migration from rural villages to urban towns and expanding cities? Trying to answer such major questions was the task of the early sociologists. But to do so, it was not enough just to collect a mass of evidence and data. What was needed were theories – logically related statements which interpret and explain the available data and evidence – enabling a deeper understanding of society and social change. This section focuses on the developed industrial societies, illustrating sociological theorizing with a mix of classical and contemporary theories. These are not exhaustive though, so the Further Reading includes general theory texts for readers to follow up their own particular interests.

In Reading 4, Karl Marx sets out his grand theory of social change based on an essentially simple idea, that all societies contain a fundamental conflict of interest which drives them forward. Marx saw this as a series of class conflicts between property owners and non-owners which could only be resolved by the revolutionary transformation of existing social relations. Industrial capitalism was just

the latest version, which simplified and made more explicit the class conflict between workers and capitalists. Using the analogy of a sorcerer making use of spells to conjure up wondrous modern inventions, Marx shows how capitalism radically transformed human beings' relationship to the natural world. And though capitalist modernity offers apparently limitless opportunities for some, this is only at the expense of poverty and exploitation for many more. Marx argued that in the long term, capitalism would give way to another mode of production – communism – that eliminated class conflicts altogether. So far, this forecast has failed to materialize.

With industrialization came a wider and more intense division of labour as factory work came to be broken down into smaller repetitive tasks requiring less skill. The process of industrial production also spread geographically creating increasingly global levels of interdependence. The consequences of an expanding division of labour are discussed by Emile Durkheim in Reading 5. Like many other commentators at the time, Durkheim saw industrialization as radically changing the older pattern of social relations. He described this as a shift away from unthinking, habitual forms of 'mechanical' solidarity, towards an 'organic' solidarity rooted in the interdependencies created by the division of labour. And though the latter was certainly much less personal and emotionally fulfilling for individuals, it was actually a more solid



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5. From Mechanical to Organic Solidarity

Emile Durkheim

The totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average members of a society forms a determinate system with a life of its own. It can be termed the collective or common consciousness. Undoubtedly the substratum of this consciousness does not consist of a single organ. By definition it is diffused over society as a whole, but nonetheless possesses specific characteristics that make it a distinctive reality. In fact it is independent of the particular conditions in which individuals find themselves. Individuals pass on, but it abides. It is the same in north and south, in large towns and in small, and in different professions. Likewise it does not change with every generation but, on the contrary, links successive generations to one another. Thus it is something totally different from the consciousnesses of individuals, although it is only realized in individuals. It is the psychological type of society, one which has its properties, conditions for existence and mode of development, just as individual types do, but in a different fashion. For this reason it has the right to be designated by a special term. It is true that the one we have employed above is not without ambiguity. Since the terms 'collective' and 'social' are often taken as synonyms, one is inclined to believe that the collective consciousness is the entire social consciousness, that is, co-terminous with the psychological life of society, whereas, particularly in higher societies, it constitutes only a very limited part of it. Those functions that are judicial, governmental, scientific or industrial – in short, all the specific functions – appertain to the psychological order, since they consist of systems of representation and action.

However, they clearly lie outside the common consciousness. To avoid a confusion¹ that has occurred it would perhaps be best to invent a technical expression which would specifically designate the sum total of social similarities. However, since the use of a new term, when it is not absolutely necessary, is not without its disadvantages, we shall retain the more generally used expression, 'collective (or common) consciousness', but always keeping in mind the restricted sense in which we are employing it.

[. . .]

In fact we all know that a social cohesion exists whose cause can be traced to a certain conformity of each individual consciousness to a common type, which is none other than the psychological type of society. Indeed under these conditions all members of the group are not only individually attracted to one another because they resemble one another, but they are also linked to what is the condition for the existence of this collective type, that is, to the society that they form by coming together. Not only do fellow-citizens like one another, seeking one another out in preference to foreigners, but they love their country. They wish for it what they would wish for themselves, they care that it should be lasting and prosperous, because without it a whole area of their psychological life would fail to function smoothly. Conversely, society insists upon its citizens displaying all these basic resemblances because it is a condition for its own cohesion. Two consciousnesses exist within us: the one



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2. In order to simplify our exposition we assume that the individual belongs to only one society. In fact we form a part of several groups and there exist in us several collective consciousnesses; but this complication does not in any way change the relationship we are establishing.
3. Nevertheless, these two consciousnesses are not regions of ourselves that are 'geographically' distinct, for they interpenetrate each other at every point.
4. There is nothing that demonstrates that the intellectual and moral diversity of societies is destined to continue. The ever greater expansion of higher societies, whereby the absorption or elimination of less advanced societies occurs, is tending in any case to lessen that diversity.
5. Thus the duties we have towards society do not take precedence over those we have towards our country. For the latter is the sole society that is at present realized of which we form part. The other is hardly more than a *desideratum*, whose realization is not even certain.
6. Cf. Beaussire, *Les principes de la morale*, introduction.



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Tilly and Scott, 1978). There were extremely strong sanctions against non-marital sexuality for such women. They did not work in public, only in their own households, and were excluded from the public sphere of the state, lacking citizenship rights such as suffrage and, if married, ability to own property. Violence against wives by husbands was condoned as legitimate chastisement 'so long as the rod was no thicker than a man's thumb'. Cultural institutions, such as the church, supported the notion that a woman's place was in the home.

There were some limits and contradictions to this private model of patriarchy, but they do not destroy the general case. For instance, it was applied to middle-class women to a much greater extent than working-class women, although there were attempts to extend it (for instance the legislation which banned women from working down the mines and restricted their factory employment).

The contemporary form of patriarchy is of a more public kind, and the trend is still in this direction. Women have entered the public sphere, yet are subordinated there. Most women of all social classes engage in paid work. Simultaneously, there is a considerable wages gap between men and women and extensive occupational segregation. The sanctions on non-marital sexuality, while still present to a greater degree for women than for men, are much less severe. At the same time the circulation of sadistic pornographic images has increased. Marriages can be, and increasingly are, legally dissolved. While women are thereby freed from marriages which are especially oppressive, they still remain responsible for child care after divorce, thus continuing the demands upon their labour started in marriage. This is now done under circumstances of increased poverty. Women have citizenship rights which are formally the same as those of men, but they form only a tiny proportion of the elected representatives, and a tiny proportion of the political agenda is around women's concerns. Violence against wives, while tolerated, is not quite as legitimate as it once was, since it can now be used as grounds

for divorce, and minimal welfare provision is available to those who flee; however, few legal penalties await the vast majority of men who are violent against women. Cultural institutions increasingly allow women's active participation, but usually in an inferior way.

Women have entered the public sphere, but not on equal terms. They are now present in the paid workplace, the state and public cultural institutions. But they are subordinated within them. Further, their subordination, in the domestic division of labour, sexual practices, and as receivers of male violence, continues.

The private and public forms of patriarchy constitute a continuum rather than a rigid dichotomy. The trend towards a more public form has been continuing despite the economic recession which some expected to stop the entry of women into paid work, and despite the development of the New Right. We do not yet see its full development. We should expect the movement into paid work to continue, especially given the increase in the number of young women gaining educational qualifications, the reduced expectancy that a husband is for life, and the slow, but steady, removal of barriers to women's participation in paid work. The private form of patriarchy which existed among the middle classes in the nineteenth century did not reach the full limits of that model. We can see its further development in Islamic populations (especially among the upper classes – the lower classes in the countryside could not afford for women not to work outside the home).

Within Britain itself we see different degrees of public and private patriarchy among different ethnic groups. Afro-Caribbeans are closer to the public form, Muslim Asians to the private form, with whites in the middle. Afro-Caribbean women have the highest rates of participation in paid work and the highest rates of female-headed households of the three groups. Muslim Asian women have the lowest rates of paid work, and have the most intense forms of male-headed families (Brown, 1984). Whites appear to be moving towards the Afro-Caribbean pattern.



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improve through throwing it wide open to its own potential. Many little victorious battles added up to a victorious war. One after another, hurdles have been taken apart, ramparts crushed and locks broken in the incessant, stubborn work of emancipation. At each moment a particular constraint, an especially painful prohibition was under attack. In the end, a *universal dismantling of power-supported structures* has been the result. No new and improved order has emerged, however, from beneath the debris of the old and unwanted one. Postmodernity (and in this it differs from modernist culture of which it is the rightful issue and legatee) does not seek to substitute one truth for another, one standard of beauty for another, one life ideal for another. Instead, it splits the truth, the standards and the ideal into already deconstructed and about to be deconstructed. It denies in advance the right of all and any revelation to slip into the place vacated by the deconstructed/discredited rules. It braces itself for a life without truths, standards and ideals. It is often blamed for not being positive enough, for not being positive at all, for not wishing to be positive and for pooh-poohing positivity as such, for sniffing a knife of unfreedom under any cloak of saintly righteousness or just placid self-confidence. The postmodern mind seems to condemn everything, propose nothing. Demolition is the only job the postmodern mind seems to be good at. Destruction is the only construction it recognizes. Demolition of coercive constraints and mental blocks is for it the ultimate purpose and the end of emancipatory effort; truth and goodness, says Rorty, will take care of themselves once we have taken proper care of freedom.

[. . .]

All in all, postmodernity can be seen as restoring to the world what modernity, presumptuously, had taken away; as a *re-enchantment* of the world that modernity tried hard to *dis-enchant*. It is the modern artifice that has been dismantled; the modern conceit of meaning-legislating reason that has been exposed, condemned and put to

shame. It is that artifice and that reason, the reason of the artifice, that stands accused in the court of postmodernity.

The war against mystery and magic was for modernity the war of liberation leading to the declaration of reason's independence. It was the declaration of hostilities that made the unprocessed, pristine world into the enemy. As is the case with all genocide, the world of nature (as distinct from the house of culture modernity set out to build) had to be beheaded and thus deprived of autonomous will and power of resistance. At stake in the war was the right to initiative and the authorship of action, the right to pronounce on meanings, to construe narratives. To win the stakes, to win all of them and to win them for good, the world had to be *de-spiritualized*, de-animated: denied the opacity of the *subject*.

[. . .]

I propose that:

1 The term *postmodernity* renders accurately the defining traits of the social condition that emerged throughout the affluent countries of Europe and of European descent in the course of the twentieth century, and took its present shape in the second half of that century. The term is accurate as it draws attention to the continuity and discontinuity as two faces of the intricate relationship between the present social condition and the formation that preceded and gestated it. It brings into relief the intimate, genetic bond that ties the new, postmodern social condition to *modernity* – the social formation that emerged in the same part of the world in the course of the seventeenth century, and took its final shape, later to be sedimented in the sociological models of modern society (or models of society created by modern sociology), during the nineteenth century; while at the same time indicating the passing of certain crucial characteristics in whose absence one can no longer adequately describe the social condition as modern in the sense given to the concept by orthodox (modern) social theory.



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reflexivity or circularity of social knowledge. Design faults and operator failure clearly fall within the category of unintended consequences, but the category includes much more. No matter how well a system is designed and no matter how efficient its operators, the consequences of its introduction and functioning, in the contexts of the operation of other systems and of human activity in general, cannot be wholly predicted. One reason for this is the complexity of systems and actions that make up world society. But even if it were conceivable – as in practice it is not – that the world (human action and the physical environment) could become a single design system, unintended consequences would persist.

The reason for this is the circularity of social knowledge, which affects in the first instance the social rather than the natural world. In conditions of modernity, the social world can never form a stable environment in terms of the input of new knowledge about its character and functioning. New knowledge (concepts, theories, findings) does not simply render the social world more transparent, but alters its nature, spinning it off in novel directions. The impact of this phenomenon is fundamental to the juggernaut-like quality of modernity and affects socialized nature as well as social institutions themselves. For although knowledge about the natural world does not affect the world in a direct way, the circularity of social knowledge incorporates elements of nature via the technological components of abstract systems.

For all these reasons, we cannot seize ‘history’ and bend it readily to our collective purposes. Even though we ourselves produce and reproduce it in our actions, we cannot control social life

completely. Moreover, the factors just mentioned presume homogeneity of interest and purpose, something which one certainly cannot take for granted as regards humanity overall. The two other influences referred to previously, differential power and the roles of values, are also important. The world is ‘one’ in some senses, but radically riven by inequalities of power in others. And one of the most characteristic features of modernity is the discovery that the development of empirical knowledge does not in and of itself allow us to decide between different value positions.

Utopian realism

Yet none of this means that we should, or that we can, give up in our attempts to steer the juggernaut. The minimizing of high-consequence risks transcends all values and all exclusionary divisions of power. ‘History’ is not on our side, has no teleology, and supplies us with no guarantees. But the heavily counterfactual nature of future-oriented thought, an essential element of the reflexivity of modernity, has positive as well as negative implications. For we can envisage alternative futures whose very propagation might help them be realized.

NOTE

1. The term comes from the Hindi *Jagannāth*, ‘lord of the world’, and is a title of Krishna; an idol of this deity was taken each year through the streets on a huge car, which followers are said to have thrown themselves under, to be crushed beneath the wheels.



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piece here, this makes his research method 'observant participation' rather than mere participant observation. Needless to say, the majority of professional sociologists would not go as far as Wacquant in the quest for

knowledge! But the question is would they have been able to provide the same intimate understanding of the small details of life in the gym by remaining relatively aloof?



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coincides with quantitative and qualitative research should not be overstated.

A further related point is that the suggestion that theory and concepts are developed prior to undertaking a study in quantitative research is something of a caricature that is true only up to a point. It reflects a tendency to characterize quantitative research as driven by a theory-testing approach. However, while experimental investigations probably fit this model well, survey-based studies are often more exploratory than this view implies. Although concepts have to be measured, the nature of their interconnections is frequently not specified in advance. Quantitative research is far less driven by a hypothesis-testing strategy than is frequently supposed. As a result, the analysis of quantitative data from social surveys is often more exploratory than is generally appreciated and consequently offers opportunities for the generation of theories and concepts. As one American survey researcher has commented in relation to a large-scale survey he conducted in the 1950s, but which has much relevance today: 'There are so many questions which might be asked, so many correlations which can be run, so many ways in which the findings can be organized, and so few rules or precedents for making these choices that a thousand different studies could come out of the same data' (Davis, 1964: 232).

The common depiction of quantitative research as solely an exercise in testing preformulated ideas falls to appreciate the degree to which findings frequently suggest new departures and theoretical contributions.

[...]

Numbers versus words

Even perhaps this most basic element in the distinction between quantitative and qualitative research is not without problems. Qualitative researchers sometimes undertake a limited amount of quantification of their data. Silverman (1984, 1985) has argued that some quantification of

findings from qualitative research can often help to uncover the generality of the phenomena being described. While observing doctor-patient interactions in National Health Service and private oncology clinics, Silverman quantified some of his data in order to bring out the differences between the two types of clinic. Through this exercise he was able to show that patients in private clinics were able to have a greater influence over what went on in the consultations. However, Silverman warns that such quantification should reflect research participants' own ways of understanding their social world.

In any case, it has often been noted that qualitative researchers engage in 'quasi-quantification' through the use of terms like 'many', 'often' and 'some' (see below). All that is happening in cases of the kind described by Silverman is that the researcher is injecting greater precision into such estimates of frequency.

Artificial versus natural

The artificial/natural contrast [...] can similarly be criticized. It is often assumed that because much quantitative research employs research instruments that are applied to the people being studied (questionnaires, structured interview schedules, structured observation schedules, and so on), it provides an artificial account of how the social world operates. Qualitative research is often viewed as more naturalistic [...]. Ethnographic research in particular would seem to exhibit this quality, because the participant observer studies people in their normal social worlds and contexts – in other words, as they go about normal activities. However, when qualitative research is based on interviews (such as semi- and unstructured interviewing and focus groups), the depiction 'natural' is possibly less applicable. Interviews still have to be arranged and interviewees have to be taken away from activities that they would otherwise be engaged in, even when the interviewing style is of the more conversational kind. We know very little about interviewees' reactions to and feelings about being interviewed. Phoenix (1994)



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11. Researching Individual Lives

Barbara Merrill & Linden West

We are all, it seems, biographers now and want to tell our stories. The genre is pervasive throughout our culture. A glance in most bookshops will reveal the extent to which biography and autobiography serve as prime vehicles for self and social exploration, or maybe self promotion. This is an age of biography, and telling stories seems ubiquitous in popular culture: we consume the stories of celebrities, are fascinated by stories on reality TV, and are constantly intrigued by wartime narratives, as witnessed by various series being repeated on television (Goodley et al., 2004). Gossip and celebrity magazines, fun-based websites, podcasts, blogs, biopics (film) and biodramas (theatre) are all sites for biographical expression and experiment, by ordinary people as well as celebrities. New biographies of celebrities appear, it seems, almost daily. Jerry Springer, the American chat show host, is using television to explore his own story and family history – including of grandmothers murdered in the Holocaust – as part of wrestling with questions of identity. Oprah Winfrey has helped create an intimate confessional as well as controversial form of media communication, which, among other things, is said to have allowed gays, transsexuals and transgender people to tell their stories. We are all, as stated, biographers now or encouraged to be so.

Very serious writers are using a biographical approach in diverse, even surprising contexts. The universe, for example, has a recent biography, as have a number of cities (Ackroyd, 2000; Gribbin, 2007). Peter Ackroyd has employed the biographical form to weave greater understanding and connections between apparently disparate

aspects of London's history. The genre allows him, he says, to do this: 'if the history of London poverty is beside a history of London madness, then the connections may provide more significant information than any orthodox historiographical survey' (Ackroyd, 2000: 2). Connecting disparate social phenomena and personal experience and weaving understanding between them in new and sometimes surprising ways characterizes, as we will illustrate, a great deal of biographical research.

Biographical methods have claimed an increasing place in academic research and are alive and well (if sometimes marginal and contested) in various academic disciplines such as literature, history, sociology, anthropology, social policy and education, as well as in feminist and minority studies (Smith, 1998). There is a mushrooming of PhD and Masters programmes, dedicated research centres and conferences which, in various ways, are concerned with researching lives and the stories people tell about them. The words used to describe such methods can vary – autobiography, auto-ethnography, personal history, oral history or life story, as well as narrative, for instance – yet as Norman Denzin (1989) has observed, there are many similarities (if also differences of emphasis). There can, for instance, be shared interest in the changing experiences and viewpoints of people in their daily lives, what they consider important, and how to make sense of what they say about their pasts, presents and futures, and the meanings they give to these in the stories they tell. There can be sensitivity towards the uniqueness yet also the similarities of lives and stories, like the



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various kinds. There can be visual biographies, using photography and video. Interviews can be combined with these other sources of evidence.) How should we conduct interviews and what might be meant by a good interview and why? How should we transcribe interviews as well as interpret and code the material? How then to employ the material in our writing or other forms of representation: how do we balance quotations with our interpretations, for instance? Crucially, what of the ethics of biographical research, given that we may engage with difficult, emotionally charged and potentially vulnerable aspects of people's lives? [...] Is there a danger of voyeurism, of being over intrusive, or of meddling with people's souls? Finally, what makes such research valid and on what terms? Such questions – both theoretical as well as practical – inform our writing.

[...] We favour, under the influence of feminism, more collaborative approaches to research, including interviewing as well as interpretation. We tend, because of our own backgrounds and values, towards working with marginalized peoples or at least to challenging dominant orthodoxies. We favour interdisciplinarity as well as engaging with our own role in the construction of the other's story. And we think it possible to build a convincing sense of the realities of others' lives, of what it is like to be in someone else's

shoes, albeit necessitating reflexive understanding of how we, and other influences, may shape the other's story.

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formation of the working class. The particular context to which sociologists have chosen to pay most attention is the one I have called the transition to industrialism. But in the end historical sociology is more a matter of how one interprets the world than of what bit of it one chooses to study. And on that basis one can say firstly, that there is no necessary difference between the sociologist and the historian, and secondly that sociology which takes itself seriously must be historical sociology. As C. Wright Mills (1959) put it, the whole 'intellectual promise' of the discipline is 'to enable men . . . to become aware of historical structures and of their own place within them'.

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also goes to all those colleagues, relatives and friends too numerous to be named here, who succored, stimulated, and comforted me during and after this research: they know who they are and what I owe them. Thanks are due also to Thierry Discepolo for the boundless energy and patience with which he worked on the production of the original French manuscript. Finally it goes without saying that this book would not exist without the generosity and fraternal trust of my 'gym buddies' from Woodlawn and of our mentor, DeeDee: I hope that they will see in it the sign of my eternal esteem and affection.

2. To keep to the great names of contemporary US literature, Arthur Krystal ('Ifs, Ands, Butts: The Literary Sensibility at Ringside,' *Harper's* 274 (June 1987): 63–67) mentions among others Ernest Hemingway, Jack London, Dashiell Hammett, Nelson Algren, James Farrell, Ring Lardner, Norman Mailer, and Ralph Ellison, joined lately by one of very few women, novelist Joyce Carol Oates, to whom we owe the beautiful *On Boxing* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1987).
3. As is attested by this note, among many others of the same ilk, written in my field notebook in August 1990: "Today I had such a ball being in the gym, talking and laughing with DeeDee and Curtis, sitting in the back room and just *living and breathing* there, among them, soaking up the atmosphere of the gym like a human sponge, that I was suddenly suffocated by a wave of anguish at the idea of having to leave soon for Harvard, where I had just been elected at the Society of Fellows. I feel so much pleasure simply *participating* that observation becomes secondary and, frankly, I'm at the point where I tell myself that I'd gladly give up my studies and my research and all the rest to be able to stay here and box, to remain 'one of the boys.' I know that's completely crazy and surely unrealistic but,

at this very moment, I find the idea of migrating to Harvard, of going to present a paper at the ASA (American Sociological Association) meetings, of writing articles, reading books, attending lectures, and participating in the *tutti frutti* of academe totally devoid of meaning and downright depressing, so dreary and dead compared to the pure and vivacious carnal joy that this goddamn gym provides me (you've got to see the scenes between DeeDee and Curtis, they're worthy of Marcel Pagnol) that I would like to quit everything, drop out, to stay in Chicago. It's really crazy. PB [Pierre Bourdieu] was saying the other day that he's afraid that I'm 'letting myself be seduced by my object' but, boy, *if he only knew*: I'm already way beyond seduction!"

4. One will find an ethnography of the matrimonial festivities of Anthony and Mark in my article, "Un mariage dans le ghetto," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 113 (June 1996): 63–84.
5. These ethnographic observations made day-to-day in and around the gym were complemented and triangulated at the end of the research journey by the systematic collection of the life stories of the main members of the Woodlawn Boys Club, over one hundred in-depth interviews with professional pugilists then active in Illinois as well as with their trainers and managers, and by the dissection of the "native" literature (specialized magazines and newsletters, biographies and autobiographies) and its scholarly derivatives (literary and historiographical writings). I also trained in three other professional gyms in Chicago and visited another dozen clubs in the United States and in Europe over a period of four years. After my departure from Chicago, I was a member of boxing gyms in Boston, New York City, and Oakland, California.
6. On the ecological fallacy, read Aaron Cicourel, "Interviews, Surveys, and the Problem of Ecological Validity," *The Amer-*



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junkie used to sell to junkie in the square and these blocks east to Third Avenue. In the morning stoned men lay on park benches, or in doorways; they slept immobile under the influence of the drugs, sometimes having spread newspapers out on the pavements as mattresses. It was then the sort of scene that might have attracted Baudelaire's spleen: in a prose poem of 1851 the poet wrote of a poisoned group of workers:

This languishing and pining population . . . who feel a purple and impetuous blood coursing through their veins, and who cast a long, sorrow-laden look at the sunlight and shadows of the great parks . . .¹

The dulled heroin addicts now are gone, replaced by addict-dealers in cocaine. The cocaine dealers are never still, their arms are jerky, they pace and pace; in their electric nervousness, they radiate more danger than the old stoned men.

In Baudelaire's Paris, misery and wealth were inextricable; everywhere he walked he encountered aggressive beggars and spontaneous fights, his lapels were grabbed by men selling watches while his pockets were picked by men stealing them. These disorders stimulated his muse. The civilized man must, somehow, take into account pain he can do nothing about. But now that accounting does not occur. Baudelaire's inflamed poetic voice no longer conjures an observer's impression of the woe of drugs, for the sight of these human beings whose bodies are short-circuiting on cocaine, while disturbing, is not too disturbing, if I also keep moving.

Along Third Avenue, abruptly above Fourteenth Street, there appear six blocks or so of white brick apartment houses built in the 1950s and 1960s on the edges of the Gramercy Park area; the people who live here are buyers for department stores, women who began in New York as secretaries and may or may not have become something more but kept at their jobs. Until very recently, seldom would one see in an American city, drinking casually in bars alone or dining quietly with one another, these women of a certain age, women who do not attempt to disguise the crow's feet at the edge of the eyes; for

generations the blocks here have been their shelter. It is a neighborhood also of single bald men, in commerce and sales, not at the top but walking confidently enough to the delis and tobacco stands lining Third Avenue. All the food sold in shops here is sold in small cans and single portions; it is possible in the Korean groceries to buy half a lettuce.

"By 'modernity,'" Baudelaire wrote, "I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable."² Gramercy Park is a community of refugees, like so many other places in New York, but here there are refugees from the family. These are ephemeral lives, one might say, their daily round consisting of little bits of business, of shopping after work, of watering plants and feeding cats in the evening. Most of the imagery of anomie, isolation, and estrangement of the nineteenth century assumed that solitude was an urban affliction. The image of a mass of solitary, middle-aged people living in characterless apartment buildings still might conjure a pathetic picture. Yet there are lots of people on the street in this swath of Third Avenue at all hours; though hardly fashionable, these blocks skirting Gramercy Park are in the companionable spirit of Constantin Guys. There is nothing sublime in this solitude; it seems to enhance the ordinary business of life.

Unfortunately, in a few minutes of walking this scene too has disappeared, and now my walk takes an unexpected turn. The middle Twenties between Third and Lexington is the equestrian center of New York, where several stores sell saddles and Western apparel. The clientele is varied: polo players from the lush suburbs, Argentines, people who ride in Central Park, and then another group, more delicate connoisseurs of harnesses, crops, and saddles. The middle Twenties play host as well to a group of bars that cater to these leather fetishists, bars in run-down townhouses with no signs and blacked-out windows. What makes the middle Twenties distinct is that all the customers in the leather shops are served alike – rudely. Saddles and whips are



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of their particular *theoretical* orientation (functionalism, Marxism, interactionism, and so on) – to “see” modern societies as being “exempt” from ecological constraints (Catton and Dunlap 1978a: 42). As part of the emphasis on the exceptional characteristics of humans, by the mid-twentieth century most sociologists were totally ignoring the biophysical environment, reflecting the implicit disciplinary consensus that it was irrelevant for understanding societal dynamics. This perspective was nicely captured in an article published in the *American Sociological Review* offering a “sociocultural theory of scarcity” in which the author argued: “If one were to ask for an expression, in a single sentence, of the main accomplishment of the social sciences to date, a fair answer would be the progressive substitution of sociocultural explanations for those stressing the determinative influence of physical nature” (Stanley 1968: 855). In the process, of course, sociologists became “sociocultural determinists”!

Given the grounding of our discipline in such an inherently unecological world-view, one that failed to recognize the ecosystem-dependence of *all* human societies, it is not surprising that sociologists were slow in paying attention to environmental problems when many other disciplines had already begun to take such problems seriously. In fact, writing at the time of the first U.S. “Earth Day,” the prominent and progressive sociologist Etzioni argued that “the newly found environmental dangers are being vastly exaggerated” and that “human problems” rather than “environmental problems” should continue to receive top priority (1970: 921).

The HEP not only blinded mainstream sociologists to the importance of environmental problems, but predisposed them to accept the optimism inherent in the DWW by assuming that endless growth and progress were not threatened by resource scarcities or other ecological constraints. For example, in a wide-ranging critique of opposition to nuclear power, the influential American sociologist Nisbet (1979) viewed such opposition as a manifestation of declining “faith

in progress” and went on to note that it was loss of such faith – rather than shortages of energy sources – that was the *real* threat to continued progress.

These optimistic tendencies were reinforced by sociologists’ habit of seeking the causes of social change solely in terms of social phenomena, rather than acknowledging the possibility that ecological conditions *might* influence modern societies. Thus, Bell, another prominent American sociologist, dismissed the idea of “*physical* limits to growth” by assuring us “that one does not need to worry about ever running out of resources,” but did acknowledge the possibility that there might be “*social* limits to growth” (1977: 18). Bell thus issued a quintessential HEP response to the “anomaly” of resource constraints by saying that *if* there were limits to the development of human societies, then they would surely be social rather than physical!

The New Ecological Paradigm

Despite the skepticism of sociologists like Nisbet and Bell and, more importantly, many sectors of society, the evidence of serious environmental problems continued to mount throughout the 1970s and has continued more or less unabated ever since. Evidence of the threats posed by local air and water pollution as well as more dispersed problems such as acid rain and ozone depletion, combined with continued energy shortages and fears of overpopulation, were seen by some sociologists as major anomalies for the HEP (and by many members of society as anomalies for the DWW) because such problems emphasized that the welfare of human societies was dependent on their biophysical environments. This awareness led some environmental sociologists to go beyond examining societal attention to environmental problems and begin analyzing more fundamental aspects of the relations between industrial societies and their environments – such as the crucial causes of environmental degradation and the societal impacts of pollution and resource scarcity (e.g., Schnaiberg 1975).



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Theme 3 – Further Reading

On cities and urban sociology, Mike Savage, Alan Warde and Kevin Ward's (2002) *Urban Sociology, Capitalism and Modernity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan) is an excellent introduction. Along with this, try Phil Hubbard's (2006) *The City* (London: Routledge) which introduces all the key debates in a readable style. For something rather more challenging, no student of urban sociology should miss Marshall Berman's classic from 1983, *All that is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso) which is an inspiring book. Philip W. Sutton's (2007) *The Environment: A Sociological Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity) is exactly what you would expect it to be. Alan Irwin's (2001) *Sociology and the Environment: A Critical Introduction to Society, Nature and Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity) makes excellent use of case studies as does John Hannigan's (2006) *Environmental Sociology: A Social Constructionist Perspective, second edition* (London: Routledge), though the latter is rooted in a specifically constructionist approach.

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Chapters 5 and 6 are designed to complement each other and contain all the major issues. However, you will find relevant material in Chapter 3 on risk and environment, pages 98–103; Chapter 4 on urbanization, pages 116–20; Chapter 13 on population growth, pages 564–8 and Chapter 22 on social movements (including green movements), pages 1010–21.



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work based on the principle of 'offshoring'. He suggests that the very common practice of 'outsourcing' or 'subcontracting' is undergoing a revolutionary change as even service sector work starts to be moved offshore to take advantage of cheaper labour and weaker regulation. A simple example is the transformation of financial services through computerized records enabling overseas call centres to deal with our personal banking needs. But Blinder argues that there are many, many more types of service work which could just as easily be 'offshored' in this way.

The big question this raises is, in the absence of manufacturing and agricultural jobs in the developed societies, just what will the workers of the future actually do to make their livings?

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to male 'normality' legitimizing the dependence of women on men and presenting a severe obstacle to movement towards equal rights. De Beauvoir compares the position of women to that of the exploited industrial working class, an argument taken up by later feminist researchers who investigated family life, housework and childcare, finding that domestic life was only 'a haven in a heartless world' for men. For women, domesticity was the centre of gender inequality, male dominance and exploitation.

A third major type of inequality is that based on 'race' and ethnicity. The concept of race has fallen into disrepute in sociology due to its implication of biologically fixed races with certain behavioural characteristics, which has no basis in scientific research and evidence. Ethnicity is now generally used to refer to the different and unequal experience of social groups with specific cultural attributes such as language, religion and dress codes. In the UK and other European societies, for instance, Black and South Asian groups are over-represented among prison populations, victims of crime and in poor housing stock, but under-represented in the higher paid occupations and higher education. Rather than seeing class, gender and ethnicity as separate from each other, sociologists have come to theorize people's life chances in terms of their position in relation to all three. For example, the life experience of black working-class women is very different from that of white, middle-class men. In Reading 26, Patricia Hill Collins explores this approach through the concept of intersecting inequalities in relation to the USA. Focusing particularly on the lives of black women, she argues in favour of policies aimed at empowering women, which, she suggests, can only be achieved if black feminism can be reinvigorated to create enough pressure for institutional reform and transformation.

In Reading 27, we return to the issue of social class with Rosemary Crompton's review

of recent arguments suggesting that the very concept of social class has become irrelevant. Although it is clear that there have been some significant social changes in the industrialized world since the 1970s, including the continuing loss of manufacturing jobs and increasing service sector employment, the rise of consumerism and individualization of identities, a widely reported 'feminization' of the workforce and the breakdown of many cohesive class-based communities, Crompton argues for the continued relevance of class analysis in sociology. Even though people's identification with class may well be competing with other forms of individual identity, for a discipline that aims to understand the structure and dynamics of social life and to explain the persistence of inequality in a globalizing world, the concept of social class remains indispensable.

The section closes with Colin Barnes, Geof Mercer and Tom Shakespeare's account (Reading 28) of 'a tale of two models', the individual and the social models of disability. Prior to the development of the social model from within the disabled people's movement, disability tended to be seen as an individual matter rooted in physical or mental infirmities – a series of personal tragedies. This view fed into a medicalization of disability that led sociologists to believe that the study of disabilities was of, at best, marginal importance for sociology. However, advocates of the social model argued that although *impairments* are very common, disability arises when the institutions and structures of society fail to accommodate people with impairments. In short, disability is *not* a personal tragedy but a consequence of the mal-organization of society. Along with campaigning disabled people's organizations, the social model has helped to shift perceptions of disability from an individual issue requiring medical intervention, to a form of deep-seated social inequality requiring political and policy solutions.



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Part 6

Relationships and the Life-Course

The human life-cycle appears to be universal. Individuals are born, they pass through childhood, youth, adulthood and old age before eventually, they die. This commonsense view is not entirely false, but sociologically speaking it is only a partial description. This becomes evident when we reflect on some of the terms used to describe people who are at particular stages of life. We are used to childhood, but what about adolescents, teenagers, youth, young adults, the 'young old' and the 'old old'? All of these categories are currently in use to describe stages of life in the developed societies, but some of them are very recent indeed. The concept of the teenager, for example, did not emerge until the 1950s when rapid economic growth enabled young people to become consumers, generating new forms of youth culture including pop music and fashion. Similarly, differentiating older people into the young old (65–74) and old old (75–84) only made sense once average life expectancy had risen significantly, creating social groups with common experiences.

What these examples show is that individual life stages are shaped by particular social contexts and cannot be accounted for by a simple biological life-cycle model. For this reason, sociologists now use the more flexible and less fixed concept of the life-course to study human existence. In Reading 29, Stephen Hunt outlines the arguments in favour of a life-course approach and works through some of the consequences of this. In

particular, he illustrates how the social changes associated with globalization are having an effect on people's experiences of the life-course.

While life-course studies have replaced those rooted in the biological life-cycle, the study of human sexuality has moved in a similar direction. Before the 1960s, heterosexuality was assumed to be the 'normal' human condition around which norms of sexual behaviour revolved. Of course, other forms of sexual orientation and behaviour existed, but these were thought to be marginal and limited to a small number of individuals. However, with the emergence of lesbian and gay social movements, this view was shown to be false. Academic interest in sexuality began to explore the history of sexuality and the way that sexual identities changed over time. One of the early pioneers in this field was Jeffrey Weeks who drew attention to the fact that sexuality is not a simple biological matter. On the contrary, it is a complex, constantly changing and highly significant aspect of human life that hitherto had received scant attention from sociologists. In Reading 30, Weeks begins from the standpoint that sexuality is a 'social and historical construct' and goes on to explore the consequences of this understanding.

One element of intimate relations that seems to be ever-present, regardless of sexual orientation is romantic love. If pop songs, novels and film are a guide, love must be *the* most significant part of all our lives. Yet many social historians have already convinced us



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Age in newspapers

Age figures in many different contexts. A real newspaper story reads as follows (names have been changed):

Brown, 45, was at the 'centre of the web' in a plot to cheat the City Council by dishonestly using highly confidential information, it was alleged. It was passed to him by Joe Green, 47, a committee chairman . . .

In the dock with Brown are ex-councillors Green and White, 49; and businessman John Grey, 45.

There is nothing particularly unusual about this story – again it appeared in a newspaper that happened to be at hand at the time of writing – and the ages of the defendants are unexceptional. None of the defendants are reported as being appalled by or proud of their age. And their ages seem irrelevant to the issue being reported – so why are they included?

Perhaps it is because the defendants' ages indicate that they are all of the same middle-aged generation. Interesting – but significant? And surely not the reason for their ages being reported. The answer is that including age is standard journalistic practice. And why? Because age conveys precise information in the minimum of space (just two typographical symbols), information that directly contributes to the construction of an image of the person being described.

But why is it not necessary to add the word 'years' after the two-digit numbers: 'Brown, 45 years, was at the centre of the web . . .'? How do we know that Brown was 45 years of age and not 45 stones in weight? Because we all know that age is typically reported in newspapers solely as a number: it has become standard practice. In this sense it is part of the language, something that we have to learn if we are to make sense of newspapers.

We also know that someone involved in such a newspaper story is quite likely to be 45 years of age (and unlikely to be 45 stones in weight). If we had read: 'Brown, 18, was at the centre of the web . . .'? we would have been confused. Surely Brown was more than 18 years of age? Could he

be 18 stone? But why would the journalist report his weight? And wouldn't the journalist have written: 'Brown, who weighs 18 stones, was at the centre of the web . . .'?

So it is convention backed up by expectations that ensures that we will understand that the 45 refers to age. This simple argument indicates how important and pervasive age has become in the relationship between the individual and society. It is not you who has decided that age is interesting, so interesting that you are going to ask everyone you meet how old they are. You didn't ask the newspaper how old Brown, Green, White and Grey were. It wasn't you who volunteered your age in a box entitled 'Other Relevant Information' when you applied for a bank loan. Rather it is the dominant values of the society in which we live, values which have emerged over decades if not centuries, that oblige us to be age-conscious and age-alert if we are to understand how to fill in forms and what we read in newspapers, and if we are to sustain meaningful communication with the social institutions around us.

And it is because we have gained such a discerning knowledge of how people behave at various ages that we in turn behave in an age-specific way. At 18 we know we are not expected to attempt to cheat the City Council by using highly confidential information. Most of us don't have such information when we were 18 and so we don't even think of cheating the Council – confirming expectations. Just as at 45 we don't even think of lying about our age in order to get into the cinema, because we know that even the most youthful-looking 45-year-old will be let in without a thought being given to age.

To summarize this argument: if we are to fully understand ageism, we have to appreciate the extent to which it is an age-specific society in which we live, and how we have all learned to be age-sensitive while not necessarily being age-conscious.

Ageism: just another 'ism'?

What is an 'ism'? How does ageism relate to sexism and racism? One answer is to assert boldly:



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be developed further. By and large, we are not yet fully aware that dying in more developed societies brings with it special problems which have to be faced as such.

The problems I have raised here are, as you may see, problems of medical sociology. Present-day medical measures relate mainly to individual aspects of the physiological functioning of a person – the heart, the bladder, the arteries and so on – and as far as these are concerned medical technique in preserving and prolonging life is undoubtedly more advanced than ever before. But to concentrate on medically correcting single organs, or areas of organs that are functioning more and more badly, is really worthwhile only for the sake of the person within whom all these part-processes are integrated. And if the problems of the individual part-processes cause us to forget those of the integrating person, we really devalue what we are doing for these part-processes themselves. The decay of persons that we call ageing and dying today poses for their fellow human beings, including doctors, a number of unperformed and largely unrecognized tasks. The tasks I have in mind here remain concealed if the individual person is considered and treated as if he or she existed solely for her- or himself, independently of all other people. I am not quite sure how far doctors are aware that a person's relationships to others have a codetermining influence both on the genesis of pathological symptoms and

on the course taken by an illness. I have here raised the problem of the relationship of people to the dying. It takes, as you see, a special form in more developed societies, because in them the process of dying is isolated from normal social life to a greater degree than it was earlier. A result of this isolation is that people's experience of ageing and dying, which in earlier societies was organized by traditional public institutions and phantasies, tends to be dimmed by repression in later societies. Perhaps, in pointing to the loneliness of the dying, one makes it easier to recognize, within developed societies, a nucleus of tasks that remain to be done.

I am aware that doctors have little time. I also know that people and their relationships are given more attention by them now than they were earlier. What does one do if dying people would rather die at home than in hospital, and one knows that they will die more quickly at home? But perhaps that is just what they want. It is perhaps not yet quite superfluous to say that care for people sometimes lags behind the care for their organs.

NOTE

1. B. Deborah Frazier, 'Your Coffin as Furniture – For Now', *International Herald Tribune*, 2 October 1979.



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Because of its potential to change us as humans, as communities, as democracies, we need to try to understand the nature of CMC, cyberspace, and virtual communities in every important context – politically, economically, socially, cognitively. Each different perspective reveals something that the other perspectives do not reveal. Each different discipline fails to see something that another discipline sees very well. We need to think together here, across boundaries of academic discipline, industrial affiliation, nation, if we hope to understand and thus perhaps regain control of the way human communities are being transformed by communications technologies.

We can't do this solely as dispassionate observers, although there is certainly a strong need for the detached assessment of social science. Community is a matter of emotions as well as a thing of reason and data. Some of the most important learning will always have to be done by jumping into one corner or another of cyberspace, living there, and getting up to your elbows in the problems that virtual communities face.

I care about what happens in cyberspace, and to our freedoms in cyberspace, because I dwell there part of the time. The author's voice as a citizen and veteran of virtual community-building is one of the points of view presented in this book: I'm part of the story I'm describing, speaking as both native informant and as uncredentialed social scientist. Because of the paucity of first-person source material describing the way it feels to live in cyberspace, I believe it is valuable to include my perspective as participant as well as observer. In some places, like the WELL, I speak from extensive experience; in many of the places we need to examine in order to understand the Net, I am almost as new to the territory as those who never heard about cyberspace before. Ultimately, if you want to form your own opinions, you need to pick up a good beginner's guidebook and plunge into the Net for yourself. It is possible, however, to paint a kind of word-picture, necessarily somewhat sketchy, of the varieties of life to be found on the Net.

[. . .]

Important critical questions have been asked about the idea of virtual community and the influence of virtual communications on human relationships. We must all address these questions if we aspire to steer the course of the technology rather than passively experiencing the changes the technology triggers. If there is something disturbing about finding community through a computer screen (and who can deny that the image of disembodied geeks who move only our fingers while staring at a tube is disturbing?), we should also consider whether it is disturbing for hundreds of millions of people to drive for hours every day in our single-passenger automobiles to cities of inhuman scale, where we spend our days in front of screens inside cubicles within skyscrapers full of people who don't know each other. Yes, we should focus on the pitfalls of spending our days in front of screens, but we should not lose sight of those cubicles, skyscrapers, cities, and automobiles when we seek the sources of our alienation.

The rubber tire and the elevator both played their part in the construction of a technology-centric community. And they are both second-generation fruits of industrialized capitalism. Virtual community sits atop a hierarchy of abstractions – language, technology, computing, networking many-to-many discussion. Virtual community is also built upon a succession of technologies and ways of life we chose to use and live in and be shaped by, because they gave many people freedom and power. Now, the biggest challenge to our freedom is our need to know how to wield the powers of new communication media. New tools exist. Who will use them, and how will they use them? Those who already have power and wealth to defend also have the knowledge of how to use media to influence and persuade others.

Technologies and literacies that help individuals and groups to dictate the conditions under which other people live are profoundly political



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without a certain additional element of punishment that certainly concerns the body itself: rationing of food, sexual deprivation, corporal punishment, solitary confinement. Are these the unintentional, but inevitable, consequence of imprisonment? In fact, in its most explicit practices, imprisonment has always involved a certain degree of physical pain. The criticism that was often levelled at the penitentiary system in the early nineteenth century (imprisonment is not a sufficient punishment: prisoners are less hungry, less cold, less deprived in general than many poor people or even workers) suggests a postulate that was never explicitly denied: it is just that a condemned man should suffer physically more than other men. It is difficult to dissociate punishment from additional physical pain. What would a non-corporal punishment be?

There remains, therefore, a trace of 'torture' in the modern mechanisms of criminal justice – a trace that has not been entirely overcome, but which is enveloped, increasingly, by the non-corporal nature of the penal system.

The reduction in penal severity in the last 200 years is a phenomenon with which legal historians are well acquainted. But, for a long time, it has been regarded in an overall way as a quantitative phenomenon: less cruelty, less pain, more kindness, more respect, more 'humanity'. In fact, these changes are accompanied by a displacement in the very object of the punitive operation. Is there a diminution of intensity? Perhaps. There is certainly a change of objective.

If the penalty in its most severe forms no longer addresses itself to the body, on what does it lay hold? The answer of the theoreticians – those who, about 1760, opened up a new period

that is not yet at an end – is simple, almost obvious. It seems to be contained in the question itself: since it is no longer the body, it must be the soul. The expiation that once rained down upon the body must be replaced by a punishment that acts in depth on the heart, the thoughts, the will, the inclinations. Mably formulated the principle once and for all: 'Punishment, if I may so put it, should strike the soul rather than the body' (Mably, 326).

It was an important moment. The old partners of the spectacle of punishment, the body and the blood, gave way. A new character came on the scene, masked. It was the end of a certain kind of tragedy; comedy began, with shadow play, faceless voices, impalpable entities. The apparatus of punitive justice must now bite into this bodiless reality.

Is this any more than a mere theoretical assertion, contradicted by penal practice? Such a conclusion would be over-hasty. It is true that, today, to punish is not simply a matter of converting a soul; but Mably's principle has not remained a pious wish. Its effects can be felt throughout modern penality.

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51. The Social Movement Society?

David S. Meyer & Sidney Tarrow

Not long ago, one of us (Tarrow 1994, pp. 193–8) suggested that the social movement form of representing claims is becoming largely institutionalized in advanced industrial democracies – so much so that classical social movement modes of action may be becoming part of the conventional repertoire of participation.¹ The idea of a movement society advances three main hypotheses:

- First, social protest has moved from being a sporadic, if recurring feature of democratic politics, to become a perpetual element in modern life.
- Second, protest behavior is employed with greater frequency, by more diverse constituencies, and is used to represent a wider range of claims than ever before.
- Third, professionalization and institutionalization may be changing the major vehicle of contentious claims – the social movement – into an instrument within the realm of conventional politics.

To the extent that these three things are happening, the social movement may lose its power to inspire challengers and to impress antagonists and authorities; it may be moving from the edges of political legitimacy, where it has warranted special responses from the state and separate analytical treatment from social analysts, to become something more akin to interest groups and political parties. Before moving to any kind of grand generalization, however, we must examine the empirical facts of the frequency, diffusion, profes-

sionalization, and institutionalization of contentious politics and the social movement.

We begin from the assumption that the social movement is a *historical* and not a universal way of mounting collective claims. Movements, in our view, are best defined as *collective challenges to existing arrangements of power and distribution by people with common purposes and solidarity, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities*. Movements became a viable way of making claims in national politics when the consolidated nation-state assured its citizens regular means of communication, created standard but fungible identities, and provided challengers with uniform targets and fulcra for acting collectively (Tarrow 1994; Tilly 1995b). But movements were never the only vehicles for contention; they acted in parallel and frequently intersected with other forms of collective action; with isolated incidents of collective violence; with strikes and campaigns mounted by unions or other institutional actors; and with the rebellions, insurgencies, and revolutions with which they have strong analogies (McAdam et al. 1997). Not only that, they often acted *within* institutional politics and movement activists learned to combine institutional modes of action with noninstitutional contention (Tilly 1978; Tarrow, 1996). Thus, if the definition of movements depends on a sustained, conflictual interaction with other actors, they have seldom been very far from institutional politics – especially in the pluralist democracies of the West.

If movements are historical phenomena and have always militated around the borders of the



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